

DREAM

EUGENE ARAM
CONVICTED

MURDER

"A H, August, I have you now."

And Charles Rucker, face working fiendishly, fingers grasping the empty air in a vain endeavor to strangle the phantom which had for six long years pursued him, sat up in bed muttering incoherently. His wife, awakened from a sound sleep, eyed her husband in terror, thinking him at first insane.

"August, you dog, you must die," Rucker hissed, his sightless eyes staring straight ahead, seeing nothing. And it came to the wife lying beside him that the man was asleep in the grip of a horrible dream. What was it he had said? Whose name had he called out in his agony? August. And August was her first husband.

"I killed him. Oh, God, I killed him," muttered the sleeping man, and he sank back in the bed exhausted with the terror of his dream. In a moment the vision with its horrible vividness had passed as dreams will, quicker than a flash of light, and Rucker was breathing heavily again unaware of the fatal words which he had called out in his moment of anguish.

But if Charles Rucker slept quietly again his wife did not. His words had aroused in her a terrible suspicion. On June 29, 1900 her first husband, August Schroeder, had died a violent death. He had been found hanging to a rafter in his own barn by his wife early one fine morning and it was supposed that he had committed suicide. The coroner up in the little town of Rock Rapids, Iowa, had brought in a verdict of self-inflicted death.

At the time of Schroeder's death Rucker had been employed as a farm hand on the Schroeder farm. The men had gone to a carnival in Rock Rapids the night before Schroeder was found dead and had returned to the farm late at night under the influence of liquor. Rucker and he turned in and Mrs. Schroeder put up the horses. Apparently Rucker was the last man to see Schroeder alive, though he had gone to bed before the latter.

The next morning Schroeder was found suspended from a rafter in his own barn. Mrs. Schroeder did not faint at the sight, though for a moment she stood paralyzed with fear and horror. Then she aroused her brothers, who were still asleep. The last man to awake in the household was Rucker. He was sleeping deeply, heavily, when he was called, and his eyes were still but half open when he sought sight of the corpse which the others had cut down. For a few seconds the wife looked at the man with suspicion, but his astonishment seemed genuine enough and the thought that he might have had a hand in her husband's death vanished. It was supposed that Schroeder in a fit of drunken remorse had staggered into the barn after the others were all asleep and hanged himself. This closed the case.

Several months after the death of Schroeder, Mrs. Schroeder yielded to the courtship of Charles Rucker. They were married. For some reason, Rucker explained it as a dislike to the country. Rucker shortly after insisted upon selling the Schroeder farm, and moving to South Dakota where they have lived since on a farm which Rucker bought with the money he had brought with him and which was the proceeds of the sale back in Iowa. Four years passed by and there was never a suspicion that Rucker had been guilty of a crime.

When Thomas Hood put into verse the story of Eugene Aram, who had slain a helpless old man for his gold and who was pursued thereafter by a nemesis that would not be shaken off, he told only the old story which was only new when Cain killed Abel. And when Eugene Aram sought out an innocent little boy and told him the story of the murder which he had committed, telling the youngster, however, that he must remember it was nothing but a dream. Aram was impelled by that resistless feeling that he must tell some one of his crime even though he knew all the time that this telling might bring him to the gallows. To be alone with the crime of murder is more than most human minds can stand. They become unbalanced and the murder comes out in one form or another. And so it has been with Charles Rucker, who gasped out the story of his crime while he lay asleep beside the widow of the man he had killed. So it was with Lady Macbeth, the



The Dream of Eugene Aram

"So will the nerve-avenging spirit,
Till blood for blood atone!
Ay, though he's buried in a cave
And trodden down with stones,
And years have rotted off his flesh—
The world shall see his bones!"

"O God! that horrid, horrid dream
Besets me now awake!
Again—again, with dizzy brain,
The human life I take;
And my red right hand grows raging hot,
Like Cramer's at the stake."

"And still no peace for the restless clay
Will wave or mold allow!
The horrid thing pursues my soul—
It stands before me now!"
The fearful boy looked up and saw
Huge drops upon his brow.

—Thomas Hood.

pathos of whose condition when she walks in her sleep, her mind overwrought with the horror of the crime which she and her husband have committed, cries out for pity.

Through the long hours of the night Mrs. Rucker lay beside the man whom she had called husband fearing to believe what she knew must be true, fearing to tax the man with the crime lest he should seize her and crush out her life as he had done with Schroeder. The horror of the situation nearly drove her mad. She feared to sleep lest she in turn should babble the story of the crime and her husband, hearing that he had been found out, should kill her while she slept.

When at last morning came she lay and watched the man whom she felt sure had murdered her first husband, watched him with the fascination with which the bird watches the snake which it knows is hungering for it, waiting only the opportune moment to take it. The man stirred at last uneasily under the steady gaze and opened his eyes. She read suspicion in them and her throat contracted in terror. But she was mistaken. It was only the natural expression, the expression which had become natural to them after four years of living alone with his crime.

She was early astir, leaving the man to doze for a short time. She felt that she if she lay longer beside him she must scream out, "I know your crime, and you must hang for it." When finally he, too, was up and dressed, Mrs. Rucker talked to him about the ordinary things of the day, about the work that must be done, the cow that must be doctored, the stores that must be bought the next time he went to town. But at last she said: "What were you dreaming about last night? You cried out in the middle of it all and woke me up. I thought some one was being murdered."

"Eh, what's that? What's it to you what I dream about?" his eyes clouded suddenly.

"Well, I want to know," said his wife stubbornly. "You said some mighty queer things while you were asleep, too," and when she saw the expression on his face she wondered how she had found the courage to question him.

"What did I say," asked Rucker, breathing hard. "What do you know, woman. Come, out with it," he said harshly, as she hesitated.

You were talking about August," she replied.

"Aye, and what did I say."

"That you killed him. Ach, let go, you brute," she screamed, for the man had clutched her suddenly by the arm. She fought him off but gradually he was overpowering her. Her strength was nearly gone when suddenly he released his grasp.

"You fool," he said. "Because I talk in my sleep you say I killed Schroeder. Who would believe you," he sneered.

She steadied herself against the wall. "I know," was all she said. "And what if you do know," said Rucker, his mood changing again. I did kill him. There you have it," he laughed hoarsely. It seemed as if a great load had been lifted from his mind. At last he had told of his crime. The hideous story was no longer bottled up in his head. Another shared it.

"Curse him, the drunken beast," the man cried impatiently. "He deserved it. Now see here, little woman," he continued, walking to a chest of drawers and opening one, "you know about this thing, but if you ever tell"—he did not finish the sentence, but pulled a revolver from the draw and leveled it at her head. The woman quailed for a moment. Her lips moved but gave out no sound. Finally she managed to gasp:

"I won't tell."

Rucker lowered the gun, "I used

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